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The Catholic Physicians' Guild

Do We Really Need One?

EDWARD J. LAUTH, JR., M.D.

There is in the Catholic Church today a freshness and a vigor which has reached the very core of her existence and which now under the leadership of the great Pope Paul VI challenges us in the positive virtue of charity. Vatican II has wrought a change in the Church of such a nature that as His Excellency, Bishop Coleman F. Carroll, of Miami, has said: "The Catholic Church will never be the same." She leads us now as she leads the world in all facets of our life.

There is little doubt in our minds that there has been a place in the past and a need for the Catholic Physicians' Guilds. Much good has been done and many problems have been solved. We are faced now however with a challenge — a challenge which is in fact before every lay organization in the Church. We are asked now by the Church: "Who are you and for what purpose do you exist?"

If our answer is simply a catechism-like reply which quotes Article II of our constitution, then I say we should no longer exist. If we meet quarterly or monthly, have a Communion Breakfast and perhaps a retreat, discuss the pill, euthanasia and abortions, and even do some charity, then I say again we should no longer exist — for we are no longer pertinent to the age of Ecumenism and the challenge of Vatican II.

Can our Guilds on the other hand be relevant? Can they exist in the main stream of Catholic thought, and exist in the age of Ecumenism? The answer is a qualified yes. In order to face up to this challenge we must re-evaluate our position and our attitudes, and expand our purpose. We must first call into question some of the parochialism which has always affected our profession and its many organizations.

Our Guilds are called Catholic Physicians' Guilds, and each word of this title must be placed in its proper order and perspective. The order as it stands is correct: *Catholic* first, next comes *Physicians*. Does this mean only M.D.'s? Are there not other doctors licensed in our states to practice medicine and who are Catholic? Would they not benefit from a discussion of medical moral problems? Do they not need the education as Catholic physicians so that they might properly apply Catholic principles to their practice of medicine. Whether we like it or not, agree or not, they do see patients and they are faced with the very same decisions and moral problems with which we are faced. Should not our Guild then first of all be Catholic and welcome to membership non-M.D.'s who practice medicine?

Today our Church is faced with, as Father Delp has said in his prison diary before his execution, "bleeding

and beaten humanity." And unless we reach out to heal the wounds, to staunch the flow of blood, to restore nutrition and a will to live to this humanity, who will?

Where do we start? Do we all dash off to the foreign missions? Of course not, great as this might sound. Our challenge is right here in our own diocese. Problems of poverty, hunger, inadequate education, poor housing, segregation, public policy in matters of birth control and rights of the individual in justice, these are all around us and must be solved. Catholic physicians in an organized guild can do much in the solution of these problems. I say that we must rid ourselves of the effects of our inbred attitude and present ourselves to our bishop. We must say to him, "Your Excellency, we are a guild of Catholic physi-

cians who offer to the Church our energies as Catholics and as physicians in whatsoever way you see fit."

If we can do this and renew our purpose, bring it into line with the *aggiornamento*, then we will be the better for it and possibly the Church will benefit from our charity and from our zeal.

We cannot be placed in the position Barbara Ward recently described: "After we die and face God He will ask 'did you feed my hungry and did you clothe the naked?' And we will say, 'Sorry, Lord, but we did give three-tenths of a percent of our gross national product'." . . . Something better is required of us.

Dr. Lauth is the founder and past president of the Catholic Physicians' Guild of Miami.